

UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

Testimony of Marcia Hughes, PhD
Research and Evaluation Analyst
Center for Social Research, University of Hartford
200 Bloomfield Avenue
West Hartford, CT 06117
mhughes@hartford.edu
860-768-5699

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My name is Marcia Hughes and I work at the Center for Social Research at the University of Hartford. I am here to speak on behalf of the *Help Me Grow* Program, administered by the Office of Early Childhood working in collaboration with The Child Development Infoline (CDI), a specialized unit of the United Way of Connecticut/211. As many of you know, *Help Me Grow* is a system for identifying as early as possible, children at risk for poor developmental and behavioral outcomes and linking them and their families to community-based programs and services. *Help Me Grow* is accessed through a statewide toll free number at the Child Development Infoline.

Since the program's inception, first as a pilot program in Hartford in 1997 and then as a statewide initiative in 2002, thousands of parents in CT needing help with their child have called *Help Me Grow*. Young children with behavioral and developmental problems and their families often have multiple needs (Hair et al., 2006; Neely-Barnes and Dia, 2008) and typically each need is bound to the next. However, service delivery and interventions often focus on single problems and operate in isolation from each other. Families have problems understanding the roles of the different agencies and ultimately are confused about what services are available and become frustrated trying to access them (King, Cathers, King, and Rosenbaum, 2001; Sloper and Beresford, 2006). Many times their needs are not adequately addressed (Halfon, Duplessis, and Inkelas, 2007).

When parents call *Help Me Grow*, the phone is answered by one of six care coordinators who have a broad knowledge base of child development issues, available resources and services, agency and professional roles, and where to find information. The role of the care coordinator is to help families navigate service systems and connect them to needed program resources. They collaborate with a range of professionals across service sectors and ensure that access to and delivery of service from different agencies is coordinated. They provide parents with information on where to call, who to speak to, what questions to ask and, whenever necessary, will assist with completing application packages.

Since fiscal year 2008 the Center for Social Research at the University of Hartford has conducted annual evaluations on the *Help Me Grow* program using the Results-Based Accountability framework (RBA, Freidman, 2005) examining, among many other things, trends in the number of callers, the top referrals made on behalf of families, the number of families participating in developmental screening, and the percentage of families who are connected to services. Since fiscal year 2012 the number of callers seeking information or advice on their child has increased by 10% and there has also been a corresponding increase in the number of referrals made on behalf of families. This is likely due to a systematic effort to promote the program through regional network meetings with community-based programs and in spring 2014, a *Help Me Grow* Campaign to increase awareness and referrals to the *Help Me Grow* Ages & Stages Child Developmental Monitoring Program.

Outcomes of family referrals for service and information have averaged an 81% success rate over the past 4 fiscal years showing that families are successfully connected to services 4 out of 5 times. Moreover, compared to fiscal years 2012 and 2013, in 2014 there were, respectively, a 24% and 35% increase in the number of families who entered the *Help Me Grow* Ages & Stages Child Developmental Monitoring program. (See 2015 Program Report Card: *Help Me Grow* / Child Development Infoline, United Way of CT). Also of note, phone calls come in from all over the State but consistently over the years the majority of families who contact *Help Me Grow* reside in the urban core and urban periphery town groups of Connecticut (see analysis on “5 Connecticut town groups,” CT State Data Center, Levy, Don, Rodriguez, & Villemez, 2004) indicating that *Help Me Grow* services are reaching families in high-risk communities (see also *Help Me Grow: 2014 Evaluation Report*, Hughes & Joslyn, 2014).

Importantly, in 2012 the Center for Social Research conducted a study asking families directly for feedback (manuscript in preparation, Hughes, Joslyn, Wojton, O'Reilly, & Dworkin). We recruited families who called *Help Me Grow* to participate in a phone interview. Using a survey and coding system modeled on the five protective factors and related theoretical underpinnings of the Strengthening Families approach (see Strengthening Families, A Protective Factors Framework, Center for the Study of Social Policy Web site, <http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies>), we evaluated the effect of *Help Me Grow* on child progress and family functioning. Findings demonstrated that HMG support to families and connection to programs and services enhanced protective factors even among families with differing needs. Some parents needed help with complex issues or problems while others needed practical information or guidance on their child's development. Many families reported on the benefits of being connected to services such as the Ages & Stages Child Developmental Monitoring Program, and to support groups with other parents of children with similar needs. Families who called under stress, sometimes in crisis, were able to gain access to necessary help. Family ratings on the survey indicated that the services and strategies employed by *Help Me Grow* are effectively building resiliency in families. Overall, the parents we spoke with had a better understanding of service systems and programs and how to access them and had more knowledge of their child's development. As a result, family circumstances and parent-child relationships improved as in many cases did the child's behavior, and parents felt better able to cope with their situation. By enhancing child and parenting behaviors and patterns of family interactions, intervention studies and meta-analyses have shown that there are long-term, cumulative, protective effects on the development of a child's cognitive and social competence.

In sum, given 1) the need for *Help Me Grow*, 2) the success of recent state investment in promoting *Help Me Grow*, and 3) the evidence of short and long term positive impact that *Help Me Grow* has on children's healthy development and family well-being, I respectfully state that cutting *Help Me Grow* is misguided and urgently request that you support keeping it in the State budget.

Please feel free to contact me if there are any questions. Thank you.